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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000660

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: A SWING THROUGH THE NORTHWEST

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons 1.5 (B & D).

1. (C) Poloff completed a pre-election trip to Nigeria's northeast region, the home of incumbent Vice President Atiku Abubakar and a key to President Obasanjo's re-election bid. Poloff found crumbling infrastructure, pessimism about the elections and worried Obasanjo-Atiku campaign officials. Political violence has occurred in the area, with the worst conflicts in Adamawa. INEC's pre-election groundwork was minimal; the sense was that the elections would produce an Obasanjo victory, whether he actually won or not.

ADAMAWA

2. (C) Adamawa State, the home of Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, is an important electoral battleground. The incumbent governor, Boni Haruna, facing his first ever election, might lose. (NOTE: Haruna assumed the governor's office when Atiku vacated it after being selected as Obasanjo's running mate. END NOTE.) Most local observers rank Atiku's election in 1999 as suspect, with his victory the result of manipulating the vote count. The man he beat, Bala Takaya, is the AD candidate this time. The ANPP candidate is an established, somewhat popular politician, Adamu Mu'azu Modibbo. Adding to Boni's difficulties, Bala hails from the same hometown. But Boni's heaviest baggage has been his non-performance. Roads are decaying, electrical and water supplies are sporadic; the state government has been remiss in paying salaries on time. The state paid two months of arrears to pensioners and bureaucrats last week, leaving them only six months behind. The roads are so bad, according to one PDP member, that Haruna and the Vice President took a helicopter to a town about 150 km. away from the capital last week to "avoid pieces of the road being tossed at them" by residents along the route.

BAUCHI

3. (C) ANPP presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari and current Vice-President Atiku held campaign rallies in Bauchi in the past week. Buhari attracted thousands of supporters on arrival at the local airport. According to one man who attended the rally, Buhari was late due to the throng blocking the route from the airport to the stadium, a scene allegedly repeated at most Buhari campaign whistlestops throughout the north and northern middlebelt. In contrast, members of Atiku's campaign entourage complained to Poloff that the Obasanjo-Atiku ticket was a hard sell. "We have to pay local government chairmen to hire busloads of people to attend rallies," one lamented. Further, Bauchi's traditional rulers refused to attend the Atiku rally, declining due to "illness." The PDP governor of Bauchi Mu'azu faces serious opposition from an ANPP candidate backed by the traditional rulers and the conservative elements of the Bauchi communities. His detractors claim that he is an unpopular candidate who "stole" the 1999 elections. His supporters say he is popular on the ground, and that the assets of incumbency combined with a solid track record of community achievements will allow him to prevail.

BORNO

4. (C) Buhari's rally in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state, was one of the few Buhari events which gained some media attention. According to a PDP activist in Borno, the stadium was overflowing and en route to the city, Buhari was stopped by cheering reporters. Incumbent Governor Mala Kachalla, who jumped to the AD after losing the ANPP nomination, faces a serious challenge by both the PDP and ANPP candidates. In spite of lapses in paying salaries and neglect of the development of vast areas of the state,

traditional and conservative elements in Borno support him, but that may not be enough to carry the day.

GOMBE

15. (C) When Obasanjo arrived in Gombe for a campaign appearance, he found a party in disarray. According to a PDP senator, virtually the entire PDP membership has moved to the ANPP. Both Buhari and Atiku appeared there, with tales similar to those from Bauchi being repeated. While the state has a larger Christian population than some of its neighbors, Buhari seems to transcend the religious divide.

YOBE AND TARABA

16. (C) Yobe and Taraba states comprise the northern and southern extremes of the Northeast. In Yobe, the ANPP holds the cards, with an incumbent governor and a conservative populace. PDP candidates complained of harassment and attacks, but compared to other areas, these are of minor scale. In Taraba, where the religious divide is most evident, Buhari received an outpouring of support on his visits to the state. The incumbent PDP governor is increasingly isolated from the national party and is vulnerable; however, opposition candidates are not very attractive.

COMMON THEMES

17. (C) Violence is present throughout the area, with the worst conflicts occurring in Adamawa. Most common are localized clashes between PDP and ANPP supporters and attacks on motorcades. In Adamawa, the grandson of the Vice-President's father-in-law was arrested on the orders of the incumbent governor for alleged "anti-government activities;" he was caught distributing ANPP posters in the capital of Yola. Throughout the region, INEC has yet to complete preparations for displaying a voters list or a candidates list. While everyone assumes that the polling places will be the same as the September registration sites, much concern remains about last minute substitutions.

18. (C) COMMENT: Regardless of party, there is widespread disenchantment with incumbent office holders at all levels. However, most people believe election rigging is inherent in the political culture and note manipulation will keep far more incumbents in office than actually deserve to return. On the presidential election, Obasanjo and Atiku might not attract the crowds that Buhari has, but they have the assets of incumbency and some real support as well. However, it appears that Buhari has captured the momentum in this region and will carry it into election day. This represents a reversal of fortune from several months ago. Immediately after the PDP and ANPP party conventions in January, Obasanjo would likely have carried the region. Now, a growing number of northerners believe that the only way Obasanjo can take the region is by tampering with the vote count.

JETER